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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000543

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER
WHITE HOUSE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
NEW YORK FOR AMBASSADOR BOLTON

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SUBJECT: YOUR MEETING WITH ISRAELI FM TZIPI LIVNI

REF: A) TEL AVIV 0515 B) TEL AVIV 0282 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Tzipi Livni's first visit to Washington and New York as Foreign Minister offers her a chance to demonstrate on an international stage the same confidence, frankness and poise that have made her one of Israel's most popular politicians. Considered too young, at 47, to be Prime Minister Sharon's deputy, Livni has assumed this role under Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, even though Shimon Peres technically outranks her. In parliament for less than seven years, Livni has already held seven ministerial portfolios and has developed into one of the most influential leaders of the centrist Kadima party. She is still learning to juggle her three current ministerial jobs while simultaneously spearheading much of Kadima's campaign efforts and raising two sons. In the event of a Kadima victory on March 28, this former lawyer and Mossad agent will likely have her pick of cabinet postings.

2. (C) The Foreign Minister has three clear priorities for her February 6-8 visit: 1) discussing how to deal with the Palestinians; 2) countering threats from Iran and Hizballah; and 3) obtaining U.S. financial assistance for protecting the border from Gaza to Eilat. Following Sharon's departure from the political scene and the surprise Hamas victory, Livni's visit comes at a time when the Israeli public is increasingly worried about the future. The Israeli Government is uncertain how to deal with the Palestinians and concerned about what course the United States will ultimately take. As a result, Livni will be seeking private and public reassurances of our opposition to Hamas and support for Israel.

3. (C) Livni is nervous about a possible U.S. rejection or postponement of Israel's request for assistance. In the wake of the victory by Hamas, she now sees protection of the southern border as an urgent need and may press for inclusion of funding for security upgrades in the USG's February budget supplemental request. For her, such a step would boost both Israel's security and Kadima's political future. It would also provide a visible sign of U.S. support for disengagement, the removal of illegal outposts, and efforts to re-focus settlement activity away from the West Bank. Livni and Olmert are anxious for good news from Washington to help counter images of truncheon-wielding mounted policemen charging lines of teenage protesters during the February 1 removal of part of the Amona outpost near Ramallah. They also want to quiet criticism from the right following the Cabinet's decision on February 5 to transfer tax and custom revenues to the Palestinians.

4. (C) In discussions with the Embassy, Livni has predicted that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- and not economic issues -- will determine the winner of the March 28 Knesset elections. Livni's position on peace with the Palestinians has evolved over the years from vocal criticism of the Oslo process to support for the roadmap and territorial compromise as necessary steps to maintain Israel's Jewish character. She has clear reservations about continued revenue transfers to the Palestinians after Hamas forms a government and is sensitive to U.S. pressure on the issue. She has, however, admitted the logic of strengthening President Abbas before Hamas assumes power. While in Washington, she needs to hear that we are working to address Israel's concerns with implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, particularly regarding the Rafah crossing. Her visit follows what Livni describes as a "very positive" February 1 trip to Cairo, where she met alone with President Mubarak for more than two hours.

5. (C) Livni has welcomed the President's February 1 remarks on Israel and Iran. She may reiterate Israel's view that the Lebanese Armed Forces should deploy along the blue line to prevent continued attacks by Hizballah.

6. (C) We understand that Livni is quite legalistic in her approach to issues. Senior advisers at the MFA told us that they are trying to get her to focus on the "bigger picture," i.e., the international political context in which events are

taking place. The Foreign Ministry staff has welcomed the changeover from former Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who did not have Livni's political savvy or influence with Sharon and Olmert.

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